

I want to welcome everyone to Ford Heights today for some great news.

Eight years ago, I promised the residents of Ford Heights that I would fix their two water-related problems.

First, I promised to bring fresh water into their homes. We did that. Lake Michigan water began flowing into the Village in 2001 thanks to a cooperative effort between the Federal government, Cook County and the Village. And I must say, turning the valve on that water with Mr. Stroger and Mayor Beck was one of my proudest moments as a Congressman.

Second, I promised Ford Heights residents that I would take flood waters out of their homes. Today, we begin that process. And again it's a cooperative effort -- this time between the Federal government, the Army Corps of Engineers, the State, County, MWRD and Village.

For too long, Ford Heights residents have suffered the indignities, expense, and heartbreak of seeing their homes and belongings ravaged by flood waters. It's been a painful springtime ritual for about half of the residents of this village.

One of my earliest memories as a Congressman was visiting Ford Heights after heavy flooding in the spring of 1996. On that day, I saw some residents trapped inside their home, and others trapped outside their neighborhood.

One that day also, I watched a local resident as he returned home from the laundry-mat. His entire block was under water. So, he parked his van on the nearest dry street; grabbed his basket of clean clothes; and waded into the muddy flood waters.

He splashed through the current, carrying his clothes over his head, for almost a block. When he finally reached his home, he stood on his porch, and watched helplessly as the flood waters poured into his living room.

I didn't go inside. I didn't need to. This man's home, his belongings -- everything -- lay in ruin.

If that's not heartbreaking enough. Consider this. That man suffered the same fate year after year after year. As did about 1,500 of his neighbors.

But today I say to those people, your heartbreak will soon end.

Today, we break ground on a new a reservoir that will divert and contain future flood waters from Deer Creek. This \$8 million project will keep Ford Heights' homes clean and dry. It will remedy a health hazard for residents. It will improve drainage for communities up and down Deer Creek; remove homes and businesses from the flood plain; and bring a new park to the Village. All of these features will improve the quality of life for Ford Heights residents.

I'm proud and inspired to stand here today with so many committed local leaders, because this -- as others have said -- is a cooperative effort.

The State of Illinois and the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources -- thanks to Senators Halvorson and Meeks, and Representatives Miller and Davis and Giglio, -- kicked in \$1.5 million.

The MWRD, thanks to President O'Brien and Board Members Jim Harris and Patricia Young, contributed \$700,000.

Cook County, under President Stroger and Commissioner Sims, along with the Village of Ford Heights, under Mayors Beck and Bennett and the Village Trustees, combined to contribute more than \$800,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds.

Finally, I must thank the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers for their hard work. The Corps designed and will direct this project. Representing the Corps, I want to commend project managers Felicia Kirksey, Kimberly Majerus and Patricia Lawler; as well as John Fornek and Dave Druzicki; Colonel Johnston and Assistant Secretary Woodley.

And I want to take a moment to recognize the winning contractor who will do the work, Dyer Construction Company.

Let's give our partners a round of applause.

There's an old expression: "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink." That used to describe Ford Heights.

No more. The Village's new slogan is: "Drinking water everywhere, and not a drop of flood."

And now, Sec. Woodley, Colonel Johnston and I would like to present to Mayor Beck, on behalf of the United States Congress and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, a check for \$5.7 million to complete funding for this worthy effort.